

The magic behind the movies



Being part of the creative team for the London 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony sequence featuring James Bond and The Queen was a highlight for visual-effects facility Union VFX. Co-founder Tim Caplan chats to Shipshape about how Union's role as a boutique studio is developing all the time.

Union was set up in 2008 by Adam Gascoyne and Tim Caplan to provide a creative service for feature film and TV productions. Based in London's Soho, the studio was founded on a culture of "originality, innovation and collaboration".

Adam and Tim had worked together in the early 1990s before going their separate ways to other facilities for a few years. Then in 2008 they decided to pool their experience and set up Union.

"We've always generally agreed on how things should be run internally as an employer of creative talent and externally as a creative service provider for film and TV productions," says Tim.

Union regularly works with a number of the world's top filmmakers. Several feature films on their showreel have achieved widespread critical acclaim such as *The Theory of Everything* and *Philomena*. In this year's London Film Festival, Union has four films showing, including the opening and closing night films *Suffragette* and *Steve Jobs*.

But Tim says their highlight to date was being part of Danny Boyle's creative team for the London 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony. "We were heavily involved in making the short films, including the James Bond and The Queen's arrival sequence."

Dividing up responsibilities
As VFX supervisor, Adam

discusses and plans the creative aspects with the film director, while Tim deals with producers on the financial side.

"It's a good cop, bad cop routine," explains Tim. "There is crossover but we try to keep it separate. I think it works better that way for us and the client."

"With regards to running the business, having two of us to balance out the anxieties really helps," says Tim. "We've learnt to trust our instincts and even if sometimes we start from a different place we invariably reach agreement once we've talked it through."

An evolving role

The company has "enjoyed steady growth" over the last seven years, although it has faced challenges at every stage. The biggest decision to date was moving into new offices three times the size of their original studio capacity. Although worried they might not get enough work to justify it, they filled the space almost from day one and have been busy ever since. In fact, Tim says they may need an even bigger space soon, which may enable them to branch into other related markets.

"Filmmaking is a hugely collaborative process. Our role is expanding all the time and now ranges from planning shoots and problem-solving, to working responsibly with budgets and providing a dedicated team of artists in the post-production

phase. We've established a niche as a creatively driven VFX studio with a reputation for imaginative solutions and quick turnarounds."

Taking on the global VFX market

"The bigger VFX facilities have studios all over the world to take advantage of territories that offer generous production tax credits," explains Tim. "Flexibility and collaboration are increasingly in demand, which works in favour of the smaller VFX companies, as we tend to be more agile, accessible and reactive than the bigger set-ups. The UK has generous tax incentives too."

A helping hand from Shipleys

Shipleys works with Union on a range of issues. "We regularly meet with Simon Robinson," says Tim. "He's helped us understand the business side of things at each stage. He's a great sounding board and really helps us feel confident in making the important decisions."

"Shipleys is always accessible – they're just around the corner and react quickly to any questions. They're also very good at advising us on where to look for external help – such as HR services, pensions, property and leases."

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